

Message Text

PAGE 01 STATE 116074

20

ORIGIN EA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 NSCE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07

H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01

SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 OMB-01 SAJ-01 SAM-01 DRC-01 /118 R

DRAFTED BY EA/VN:RHWENZEL:BK

APPROVED BY A:MSTEARNS

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P R 032152Z JUN 74

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY SAIGON PRIORITY

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

USDEL JEC PARIS

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

CINCPAC

UNCLAS STATE 116074

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

TAGS: PFOR, VS

SUBJECT: SZULC ARTICLE

OR AMBASSADOR FROM STEARNS

. TAD SZULC'S ARTICLE IN CURRENT EDITION OF FOREIGN RELATIONS, WHICH REPRINTED SUBSTANTIALLY IN WASHINGTON POST UNE 2, PURPORTS TO MAKE A PARTIAL RECONSTRUCTION OF QTE HE EXTRAORDINARY DIPLOMATIC STORY BEHIND THE SECRET 1972 ND 1973 NEGOTIATIONS LEADING TO THE VIET-NAM CEASE-FIRE AGREEMENT UNQUOTE. THERE FOLLOWS EXCERPTS WHICH WILL BE OF PARTICULAR INTEREST TO YOU. AMBASSADOR PHUONG SUGGESTS UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 STATE 116074

HAT YOU MIGHT ALSO PASS THESE TO GVN. FULL TEXT BEING TOUCHED.

. QUOTE. THE UNITED STATES HAS MADE A SERIES OF SECRET

COMMITMENTS TO NORTH VIETNAM, MOST OF WHICH HAVE REMAINED UNFULFILLED, TO IMPLEMENT THE CEASE-FIRE AGREEMENT. THE MOST IMPORTANT COMMITMENT COVERED THE REMOVAL, WITHIN A YEAR, OF ALL AMERICAN CIVILIANS IN SOUTH VIETNAM ENGAGED IN SUPPORTING SOUTH VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES. SIMULTANEOUSLY, THE UNITED STATES HAS SECRETLY COUNSELED SAIGON ON HOW TO END CERTAIN MILITARY PROVISIONS OF THE CEASE-FIRE, THE BAN ON PROCURING MORE SOPHISTICATED PLANES AND SHIPPING ARMS TO CAMBODIA UP THE MEKONG RIVER. UNQUOTE.

3. QUOTE. THE UNITED STATES AND NORTH VIETNAM SUCCESSFULLY NEGOTIATED, EXCEPT FOR ONE UNRESOLVED POINT, AN AGREEMENT ON AMERICAN AID TO HANOI FOR ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION. THE ACCORD WAS REACHED IN PRINCIPLE LATE IN MARCH 1973, BUT THE ADMINISTRATION SHELVED IT BECAUSE OF ITS DISPLEASURE OVER COMMUNIST TRUCE VIOLATIONS. BOTH THE AGREEMENT AND THE SHELIVING HAVE BEEN KEPT SECRET. UNQUOTE.

4. QUOTE. AMERICAN MILITARY AID TO SOUTH VIETNAM IS CURRENTLY COORDINATED THROUGH A SPECIAL "COVERT" SECTION IN THE OFFICE OF THE DEFENSE ATTACHE IN THE AMERICAN EMBASSY IN SAIGON. THE SECTION IS A "MINICOMMAND" WITH OVER 100 PERSONNEL. IT REPORTS TO A U. S. MILITARY HEADQUARTERS IN THAILAND. UNQUOTE.

5. QUOTE. THE REAL TURNING POINT IN THE NEGOTIATIONS CAME NOT IN PARIS, BUT MOSCOW, WHEN HENRY KISSINGER INDICATED TO SOVIET LEADER LEONID BREZHNEV, DURING A SECRET VISIT LATE IN APRIL 1972, THAT THE UNITED STATES, IN EFFECT, NO LONGER DEMANDED THE WITHDRAWAL OF NORTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS FROM SOUTH VIETNAM AS A PRIOR CONDITION. THE FOLLOWING MONTH, AT THE MOSCOW SUMMIT, KISSINGER STUNNED THE RUSSIANS WITH A PROPOSAL FOR A TRIPARTITE ELECTORAL COMMISSION IN SOUTH VIETNAM. APPARENTLY WITH SOVIET AND CHINESE DIPLOMATIC HELP, THE UNITED STATES THEN WON, AS A QUID PRO QUO, HANOI'S WILLINGNESS TO DROP ITS INSISTENCE UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 STATE 116074

ON PRESIDENT THIEU'S REMOVAL PRIOR TO A CEASE-FIRE. THESE EVENTS LED TO THE NORTH VIETNAMESE SECRET PEACE PROPOSAL IN OCTOBER 1972, AND ULTIMATELY TO THE SETTLEMENT. UNQUOTE.

6. QUOTE. THROUGHOUT MOST OF THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS IN 1972, KISSINGER KEPT SAIGON IN THE DARK ABOUT HIS DIPLOMACY. AS LATE AS AUGUST, HE ENCOURAGED THIEU TO PREPARE FOR AN INVASION OF NORTH VIETNAM AFTER THE U. S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. ONLY IN OCTOBER, HOWEVER, DID HE ACKNOWLEDGE TO THIEU THAT THE UNITED STATES WAS NO LONGER DEMANDING THE DEPARTURE OF HANOI'S FORCES FROM THE SOUTH. UNQUOTE.

7. QUOTE. KISSINGER BELIEVED THAT DETENTE COULD FLOURISH IN THE LONG RUN ONLY WITH THE LIQUIDATION OF THE VIETNAM WAR. THUS, IN 1971, THE STRANDS OF U. S. POLICIES TOWARD MOSCOW, PEKING, AND HANOI BEGAN COMING TOGETHER AS KISSINGER WOVE AN INTRICATE DIPLOMATIC FABRIC IN THE COMMUNIST WORLD. THERE WERE ALSO TWO OTHER CARDINAL CONCEPTS GOVERNING THE KISSINGER POLICY: ONE WAS THAT THE UNITED STATES HAD TO EXTRICATE ITSELF FROM VIETNAM SOONER

OR LATER--EVEN IF IT MEANT A POTENTIAL BREAK WITH SAIGON, AS THIEU WAS TO DISCOVER IN GOOD TIME--AND THE OTHER WAS HIS UNSHAKABLE BELIEF, EXPRESSED PRIVATELY IN 1969, AFTER HIS FIRST SECRET MEETINGS WITH THE NORTH VIETNAMESE, THAT THE BREAKTHROUGH IN NEGOTIATIONS COULD COME ONLY AFTER A FINAL PAROXYSM OF BATTLE. HE WAS, OF COURSE, PROVED RIGHT IN 1972. MEANWHILE, HIS DIPLOMACY WAS DESIGNED TO KEEP EVERYBODY OFF BALANCE. UNQUOTE.

8. QUOTE. THE NIXON-KISSINGER DECISION THAT THIEU MUST BE SHIELDED FROM ATTACKS FROM THE U. S. CONGRESS AND PUBLIC OPINION--QUITE ASIDE FROM BEING SHIELDED FROM THE COMMUNISTS--HAD LED EARLIER TO A MAJOR AND HERETOFORE UNREVEALED POLICY DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN THE WHITE HOUSE AND ELLSWORTH BUNKER, THE AMBASSADOR IN SAIGON. BUNKER, ACCORDING TO HIS ASSOCIATES, WAS BITTERLY DISAPPOINTED BY THE THIEU MANEUVERS THAT, IN EFFECT, MADE HIS RE-ELECTION A ONE-MAN RACE AFTER BOTH KY AND GENERAL "BIG" MINH WITH-
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 04 STATE 116074

DREW FROM THE CONTEST. BUNKER TOOK THE VIEW THAT THE THIEU RE-ELECTION PLANS WERE EMBARRASSING TO THE UNITED STATES AND DAMAGING TO SOUTH VIETNAM'S POLITICAL FUTURE. CONSEQUENTLY, EARLY IN SEPTEMBER, BUNKER DISPATCHED A TOP-SECRET CABLE TO WASHINGTON, REQUESTING NEW PRESS GUIDELINES ON THE APPROACHING ELECTIONS.

BUNKER PROPOSED THAT EMBASSY SPOKESMEN BE PERMITTED TO TELL NEWSMEN THAT THE UNITED STATES REGRETTED THE POLITICAL COURSE OF EVENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM AND TO SUGGEST THAT, FOR EXAMPLE, NEW ELECTIONS COULD BE CALLED BY KY IF THIEU RESIGNED FROM OFFICE. BUNKER EMPHASIZED THAT ARTICLE 56 OF THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE CONSTITUTION PROVIDED FOR SUCH AN EVENTUALITY. THE AMBASSADOR WISHED TO OBTAIN THIEU'S FORCED RESIGNATION AND, THEREFORE, THE SCOTCHING OF HIS RE-ELECTION PLAN.

NIXON AND KISSINGER WERE IN SAN CLEMENTE WHEN THE BUNKER CABLE REACHED THE WHITE HOUSE. NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL STAFFERS WORKING ON THE VIETNAM PROBLEM DRAFTED A REPLY TO BUNKER TURNING DOWN HIS REQUEST ON THE GROUNDS THAT THIEU MUST NOT BE UNDERMINED, PARTICULARLY IN VIEW

OF THE APPROACHING SEPTEMBER 13 SESSION BETWEEN KISSINGER AND THO. THE NSC STAFF SENSED THAT KISSINGER WOULD CONSIDER ANY ANTI-THIEU PRONOUNCEMENT BY THE SAIGON EMBASSY AS SABOTAGE OF HIS NEGOTIATING STANCE IN PARIS. BESIDES, THE WHITE HOUSE ALWAYS FELT THAT POLICY SHOULD BE EXPRESSED IN WASHINGTON AND NOT SAIGON. KISSINGER, LOCATED SOMEWHERE IN THE SAN CLEMENTE AREA AT MIDNIGHT, CLEARED THE REPLY TO BUNKER BY TELEPHONE. FROM THEN ON; U. S. POLICY WAS MONOLITHICALLY IN SUPPORT OF THIEU. UNQUOTE.

. QUOTE. STILL ANOTHER SECRET PEACE PLAN WAS DRAFTED BY KISSINGER, AGAIN LOWERING THE ANTE, AND WAS DELIVERED TO THE NORTH VIETNAMESE IN PARIS BY WALTERS ON OCTOBER 11 1971).

UNDER THIS LATEST PLAN, WITHIN SIX MONTHS OF AN AGREEMENT, ALL U. S. AND ALLIED TROOPS WOULD LEAVE VIETNAM (THE DEADLINE WAS BEING REDUCED BY THREE MONTHS FROM THE AUGUST 12 PROPOSAL), ALL WAR PRISONERS WOULD BE EXCHANGED, UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 05 STATE 116074

THERE WOULD BE AN INDOCHINA-WIDE CEASE-FIRE, AND NEW ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD IN THE SOUTH. THIEU AND VICE PRESIDENT HUONG (WHO REPLACED MARSHAL KY FOLLOWING HIS RESIGNATION) WOULD RESIGN ONE MONTH BEFORE THE ELECTIONS AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE WOULD BECOME THE CARETAKER-ADMINISTRATOR. THE NEW ELECTIONS WOULD BE SUPERVISED BY AN "INDEPENDENT BODY" REPRESENTING ALL POLITICAL FORCES IN THE SOUTH, INCLUDING THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT.

AGAIN, NOTHING WAS SAID SPECIFICALLY ABOUT A NORTH VIETNAMESE WITHDRAWAL. THE COMMUNISTS WERE ALLOWED TO ASSUME THAT THE UNITED STATES HAD GIVEN UP ON THIS POINT-- KISSINGER WAS STILL DANGLING THE BAIT HE FIRST PRODUCED ON MAY 31--BUT THIEU WAS BEING TOLD IN SAIGON THAT WASHINGTON WAS LEAVING THIS MATTER FOR THE OVERALL SETTLEMENT. THIS, OF COURSE, WAS UNTRUE, BUT KISSINGER WAS ANXIOUS TO KEEP THIEU IN LINE AFTER EXACTING FROM HIM THE COMMITMENT TO RESIGN TO PERMIT NEW ELECTIONS. APPARENTLY, IT WAS NOT EXPLAINED TO HIM THAT WASHINGTON DID NOT PLAN TO MAKE AN ISSUE OF MUTUAL WITHDRAWALS. THERE WAS, IN THE SECRET TEXT, THE AMBIGUOUS STATEMENT THAT "AMONG THE PROBLEMS THAT WILL BE SETTLED IS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRINCIPLE THAT ALL ARMED FORCES OF THE COUNTRIES OF INDOCHINA MUST REMAIN WITHIN THEIR NATIONAL FRONTIERS." WHAT WAS THE WORD "REMAIN," RATHER THAN "WITHDRAW" SUPPOSED TO MEAN? ANOTHER NEW ELEMENT WAS THE PROPOSAL FOR THE "INDEPENDENT BODY" TO ORGANIZE THE ELECTIONS, BUT KISSINGER WAS CAREFUL TO AVOID THE IMPRESSION IN SAIGON THAT HE WAS TACITLY ACCEPTING COMMUNIST IDEAS FOR A COALITION GOVERNMENT-- ANATHEMA TO THIEU. UNQUOTE.

10. QUOTE. WHAT KISSINGER HAS NOT MADE PUBLIC TO THIS DAY IS THAT HIS SESSIONS WITH BREZHNEV (APRIL 1972) INTRODUCED WHAT PROBABLY WAS THE FIRST MAJOR TURNING POINT IN THE HISTORY OF THE VIETNAM NEGOTIATIONS- HE TOLD AN ASTONISHED BREZHNEV THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD BE WILLING TO ACCEPT A CEASE-FIRE IN PLACE IN EXCHANGE FOR THE DEPARTURE OF THE NORTH VIETNAMESE FORCES WHICH HAD ENTERED SOUTH VIETNAM SINCE THE START OF THE OFFENSIVE ON MARCH 30. THIS WAS A VERITABLE DIPLOMATIC BOMB; WASHINGTON

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 06 STATE 116074

HAD NEVER BEFORE EXPLICITLY AGREED TO LET ANY NORTH VIETNAMESE FORCES STAY IN THE SOUTH. UNQUOTE.

11. QUOTE. KISSINGER'S SECOND BOMB THAT AFTERNOON (MAY 25, 1972) WAS HIS SUDDEN INTRODUCTION OF THE THEME OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN VIETNAM. THIS HAD NOT BEEN DISCUSSED THE PREVIOUS EVENING BY THE PRINCIPALS AND WAS ALSO A DEPARTURE FROM THE NIXON SPEECH OF MAY 8, IN WHICH NO MENTION AT ALL WAS MADE OF VIETNAMESE POLITICS. KISSINGER ANNOUNCED THAT THE UNITED STATES WAS PREPARED TO BACK A TRIPARTITE ELECTORAL COMMISSION IN SOUTH VIETNAM, INCLUDING ELEMENTS FROM THE SAIGON REGIME, THE VIETCONG, AND THE NEUTRALISTS. THIS WAS A REAL SHIFT IN THE AMERICAN STANCE: THE UNITED STATES HAD OPPOSED SUCH A TRIPARTITE COMMISSION ALL ALONG OUT OF FEAR THAT IT COULD EVOLVE INTO A COALITION GOVERNMENT, SOMETHING SAIGON AND WASHINGTON HAD ALWAYS REJECTED. THE SECRET AMERICAN PROPOSAL OF OCTOBER 1971 HAD SPOKEN ONLY OF AN "INDEPENDENT BODY," REPRESENTING ALL POLITICAL FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM, TO ORGANIZE AND RUN THE ELECTIONS. IT HAD BEEN A FAR CRY FROM A TRIPARTITE COMMISSION. GROMYKO WAS SO TAKEN ABACK THAT HE SAID TO KISSINGER, "LET ME MAKE QUITE SURE I GOT RIGHT WHAT YOU SAID." KISSINGER REPLIED: "YES, I'M TALKING ABOUT A TRIPARTITE COMMISSION."

"KISSINGER AND GROMYKO DISCUSSED VIETNAM AGAIN ON MAY 26, COVERING ROUGHLY THE SAME GROUND. THE NET EFFECT OF THESE DISCUSSIONS WAS THAT THE UNITED STATES MADE IT CLEAR TO THE RUSSIANS THAT ITS PRIVATE NEGOTIATING POSITION WAS INFINITELY MORE FLEXIBLE THAN THE PUBLIC POSTURE. THIS COVERED THE NORTH VIETNAMESE PRESENCE IN THE SOUTH, THE WILLINGNESS TO SUSPEND BOMBING EVEN BEFORE THE RELEASE OF THE POW'S, AND THE SUPPORT FOR A TRIPARTITE ELECTORAL COMMISSION. KISSINGER WAS EDGING CLOSER AND CLOSER TO THE HANOI VIEWS--EXCEPT FOR THE IMMEDIATE REMOVAL OF THIEU--AND WAS LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR WHAT WOULD BECOME THE ULTIMATE SETTLEMENT. UNQUOTE.

12. AFTER HIS SESSION WITH THO (JULY 19, 1972), KISSINGER FLEW DIRECTLY TO SAIGON TO PRACTICE A TOTALLY DIFFERENT

BRAND OF DIPLOMACY WITH EVEN GREATER PROBLEMS. IN TALKS
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 07 STATE 116074

WITH THIEU, HE TOOK A DISTINCT TACK FROM HIS APPROACH TO
THE RUSSIANS, THE CHINESE, AND THE NORTH VIETNAMESE. THE
EMERGING PROBLEM IN SAIGON WAS TO PREPARE THIEU FOR A
SETTLEMENT.

THE KISSINGER LINE WAS THUS TO REMIND THIEU THAT A
PRESENTIAL ELECTION WAS APPROACHING IN THE UNITED STATES,

THAT THE ADMINISTRATION MUST BE FORTHCOMING IN ITS PEACE
DIPLOMACY, AND THAT IT MUST PREVENT SENATOR MCGOVERN FROM
MAKING IT APPEAR THAT SAIGON WAS BLOCKING THE PEACE. CON-
SEQUENTLY, HE SAID, THE ADMINISTRATION MUST, AS A MATTER
OF POLITICAL REALITIES, COME FORTH WITH SEEMINGLY AT-
TRACTIVE PROPOSALS KNOWING FULL WELL THAT HANOI WOULD RE-
JECT THEM. POLITICAL RISKS HAD TO BE REDUCED BEFORE THE
ELECTIONS. BUT, THE NOTION OF THE TRIPARTITE ELECTORAL
COMMISSION, OFFERED TO THE RUSSIANS, WAS NOT BROACHED TO
THIEU AT THIS TIME.

THEN, IT APPEARS, KISSINGER PROCEEDED TO MAKE EXTRA-
VAGANT PROMISES TO THIEU. AFTER THE ELECTIONS, HE ALLEGED-
LY TOLD HIM, IT WOULD BE A "DIFFERENT STORY." THE UNITED
STATES WOULD NOT HESITATE TO APPLY ALL ITS POWER TO BRING
NORTH VIETNAM DOWN TO ITS KNEES. KISSINGER RECOMMENDED
THAT THIEU START PLANNING AN INVASION OF NORTH VIETNAM
AFTER THE ELECTIONS. SPECIFICALLY, HE SUGGESTED ARVN LAND-
INGS IN VINH OR DONGHOI. THIEU, WHO APPEARED NONPLUSED BY
THIS IDEA, FINALLY REPLIED THAT IF AN INVASION WERE
MOUNTED, THANH HOA SHOULD BE THE PRIME OBJECTIVE. ACTUALLY,
THIEU HAD BEEN URGING AN INVASION OF NORTH VIETNAM AS
EARLY AS MARCH 1972 (DURING THE LAOS INCURSION), BUT COULD
ENLIST NO AMERICAN ENCOURAGEMENT AND EVENTUALLY DROPPED THE
IDEA. IT WAS FIRST REVIVED BY GENERAL HAIG IN JUNE 1972,
WHEN HE INQUIRED OF THE COMMANDER OF THE ARVN FIRST CORPS
WHETHER AN INVASION OF THE NORTH WAS FEASIBLE. WHEN
KISSINGER REACHED SAN CLEMENTE LATE IN JULY, HE TOLD SIR
ROBERT THOMPSON, THE BRITISH COUNTERINSURGENCY EXPERT WHO
WAS REPORTING TO NIXON ON HIS LATEST SURVEY IN SOUTH VIET-
NAM, THAT WE WOULD NOT BE "BASHFUL" AFTER THE ELECTIONS.
UNQUOTE.

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 08 STATE 116074

12. QUOTE. BUT KISSINGER COULD GO ONLY SO FAR WITHOUT
SOME FORM OF CONCURRENCE FROM THIEU. AFTER THE AUGUST 15
(1972) SESSION IN PARIS, THE POINT WAS REACHED WHERE SOUTH
VIETNAMESE ACCEPTANCE OF THE TRIPARTITE COMMISSION AND A

QUICKENED AMERICAN WITHDRAWAL WERE REQUIRED. HAIG WAS NOW DISPATCHED TO SAIGON TO TRY TO SELL THE NEW AMERICAN PACKAGE TO THIEU.

THIEU WAS ADAMANT. HE TOLD HAIG THAT INASMUCH AS HE CONTROLLED 90 PERCENT OF SOUTH VIETNAM (A CLAIM THE AMERICANS TENDED TO DISPUTE IN PRIVATE), AND THE VIETCONG COULD NOT EXPECT TO GARNER MORE THAN 10 OR 20 PERCENT OF THE VOTE, HE COULD NOT SEE WHY A TRIPARTITE COMMISSION WAS NEEDED AT ALL. THIEU, OF COURSE, WAS WORRIED THAT SUCH A COMMISSION WOULD TRANSFORM ITSELF INTO A COALITION GOVERNMENT. INSTEAD, HE PROPOSED A REFERENDUM IN SOUTH VIETNAM,

TO DETERMINE ITS POLITICAL FUTURE. HAIG REPORTED TO WASHINGTON THAT HE COULD NOT BREAK THE DEADLOCK WITH THIEU. BUT KISSINGER WANTED TO MAINTAIN THE MOMENTUM OF NEGOTIATIONS AND HE ARRANGED TO MEET SECRETLY WITH THO IN PARIS ON SEPTEMBER 15. UNQUOTE.

14. QUOTE. MEANWHILE A STARK AND INTENSE DRAMA WAS DEVELOPING BEHIND THE SCENES. THE PLAN WAS FOR AMBASSADOR BUNKER, IN SAIGON, TO OBTAIN THIEU'S AGREEMENT TO THE TRIPARTITE COMMISSION, WHILE KISSINGER CARRIED OUT HIS MOSCOW TALKS AND PREPARED TO MEET THO IN PARIS ON SEPTEMBER 15 (1972). KISSINGER WAS DETERMINED TO PRESENT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE WITH A PROPOSAL ON THE TRIPARTITE BODY--AGREED TO BY BOTH WASHINGTON AND SAIGON--AT THEIR FORTHCOMING SESSION. BUT LATE AT NIGHT ON SEPTEMBER 13, AFTER THE TALKS WITH THE RUSSIANS WERE FINISHED, KISSINGER, WHO WAS AT THE DOM PRYOMA ESTATE GUEST HOUSE, RECEIVED A CABLE FROM BUNKER ADVISING THAT DESPITE ALL THE EFFORTS IN RECENT DAYS; THIEU HAD REJECTED THE TRIPARTITE COMMISSION PROPOSAL. AN ASSOCIATE RECOUNTED LATER, "HENRY BLEW A GASKET." HE SAID THAT HE WAS PERFECTLY CAPABLE OF MAKING IT CLEAR TO HANOI THAT THERE WAS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A TRIPARTITE COMMISSION AND A COALITION GOVERNMENT. WALKING AROUND THE DACHA AT MIDNIGHT, KISSINGER BRIEFLY TOYED WITH UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 09 STATE 116074

THE IDEA OF RUSHING TO SAIGON TO TRY TO CHANGE THIEU'S MIND, BUT CONCLUDED THAT THE TIME HAD COME FOR THE UNITED STATES TO ACT UNILATERALLY. IT WAS TOO LATE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS TO GO BACK TO THIEU, KISSINGER TOLD HIS ASSOCIATES. SHORTLY AFTER MIDNIGHT, HE SENT A TELEGRAM TO NIXON, REQUESTING PERMISSION TO MEET WITH THO AS PLANNED AND INFORM HIM THAT WASHINGTON WOULD STAND FIRM ON THE QUESTION OF THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION REGARDLESS OF THIEU'S VIEWS. KISSINGER'S ARGUMENT WAS, AMONG OTHER THINGS, THAT WITH THE ELECTIONS AT HOME ONLY SEVEN WEEKS AWAY, THE PRESIDENT COULD NOT RISK A COLLAPSE IN THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS.

NIXON'S REPLY REACHED THE AMERICAN PARTY THE NEXT MORNING, SEPTEMBER 14, AS THEY PREPARED TO LEAVE FOR LONDON. IT SAID, IN EFFECT, THAT KISSINGER COULD GO AHEAD AND TELL THO THE NEXT DAY THAT THE UNITED STATES ACCEPTED THE TRIPARTITE COMMISSION. BUT THIS DECISION WAS NOT WHOLLY POPULAR IN THE WHITE HOUSE: HAIG, FOR EXAMPLE, COMPLAINED PRIVATELY TO FRIENDS THAT KISSINGER WAS GIVING AWAY TOO MUCH.

THE NIXON-KISSINGER DECISION WAS ANOTHER MAJOR TURNING POINT IN THE TORTURED HISTORY OF VIETNAM NEGOTIATIONS. FOR

THE FIRST TIME, NIXON WAS READY TO MAKE A MAJOR OFFER TO HANOI WITHOUT THIEU'S CONCURRENCE--IN THE FACE OF HIS OUTRIGHT OPPOSITION. UNQUOTE.

15. QUOTE. KISSINGER AND SULLIVAN ARRIVED IN SAIGON ON THE MORNING OF OCTOBER 19 (1972). NOBODY THERE HAD A CLEAR IDEA OF WHAT WAS HAPPENING; KISSINGER HAD MADE A POINT OF KEEPING EVERYONE IN THE DARK. BUNKER HAD NOT SEEN THE TEXT OF THE AGREEMENT, AND WAS ONLY VAGUELY AWARE OF SOME OF ITS PROVISIONS. THIEU KNEW NEXT TO NOTHING. BUT KISSINGER WAS CONFIDENT HE COULD GET HIS AGREEMENT IN THREE DAYS OF TALKS AND THEN GO ON TO HANOI.

ON OCTOBER 19, KISSINGER AND BUNKER MET FOR THREE-AND-A-HALF HOURS WITH THIEU AT THE PRESENIAL PALACE. FOR THE FIRST TIME, THIEU SAW THE DRAFT PEACE AGREEMENT--AND ONLY UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 10 STATE 116074

IN THE ENGLISH VERSION, WHICH WAS ALL KISSINGER HAD WITH HIM. HE REACTED WITH UNDISGUISED FURY. HIS FIRST OBJECTION WAS THAT HE HAD NOT BEEN CONSULTED ABOUT THE DOCUMENT THAT KISSINGER PROPOSED TO INITIAL IN HANOI THREE DAYS HENCE. THE TEXT HE WAS SHOWN WAS STILL INCOMPLETE--THE PROVISIONS FOR THE RELEASE OF CIVILIAN PRISONERS IN THE SOUTH AND THE QUESTION OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT REPLACEMENTS REMAINED SUBJECT TO FURTHER NEGOTIATIONS--BUT THIEU OPPOSED MOST OF THE CLAUSES THAT WERE WRITTEN INTO IT. HIS ATTITUDE WAS LATER DESCRIBED BY A PARTICIPANT IN THE MEETING AS THAT OF A "TRAPPED TIGER." HE SAID HE WAS NOT READY FOR A CEASE-FIRE AND THAT HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHY THE AMERICANS HAD GIVEN UP THEIR DEMANDS FOR AN INDOCHINA-WIDE CEASE-FIRE IN FAVOR OF A TRUCE CONFINED TO VIETNAM ALONE. AT THE OCTOBER 19 MEETING WITH KISSINGER, AND DURING SESSIONS IN THE THREE ENSUING DAYS, THIEU CLAIMED THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT FLAW IN THE PROPOSED AGREEMENT WAS THAT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE WERE NOT REQUIRED TO LEAVE THE SOUTH. HE PROTESTED THAT THE DOCUMENT RECOGNIZED POST-TRUCE AREAS OF CONTROL IN THE SOUTH FOR BOTH HIS FORCES AND THE COMMUNISTS. THIS, HE SAID BITTERLY, HAD THE EFFECT OF GRANTING THE COMMUNISTS SOVEREIGNTY OVER SOME AREAS.

AS THE SESSIONS AT THE PALACE GREW INCREASINGLY TENSE--
A PARTICIPANT SAID THIEU WAS ACTING ALMOST PARANOID--THE
SAIGON LEADER ACCUSED KISSINGER OF NEGOTIATING AN AGREE-
MENT BEHIND HIS BACK AND THEN DEMANDING HIS ENDORSEMENT OF
IT IN THREE DAYS. HE TOOK EXCEPTION TO THE CONCEPT OF THE
RIPARTITE COMMISSION AND TO THE EXPRESSION "ADMINISTRATIVE
STRUCTURE" WHICH WAS STILL IN THE TEXT DESPITE KISSINGER'S
PREFERENCE FOR THE RECONCILIATION AND CONCORD COUNCIL.
EITHER WAY, HE SAID, THIS PRESAGED A COALITION GOVERNMENT.
THIEU SAW HIS SURVIVAL AS SOUTH VIETNAM'S LEADER GRAVELY

THREATENED BY THE AGREEMENT KISSINGER WAS TRYING TO RAM
DOWN HIS THROAT.

KISSINGER (WHO BY NOW HAD DEVELOPED A HATRED FOR THIEU)
ARGUED THAT THE PROPOSED AGREEMENT, COMBINED WITH AMERICAN
GUARANTEES, GAVE THE THIEU REGIME A "FIGHTING CHANCE" AND
A "DECENT INTERVAL" AFTER THE CEASE-FIRE AND THE NOW IN-
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 11 STATE 116074

EVITABLE U. S. WITHDRAWAL. HE TOLD THIEU: "WE WERE
SUCCESSFUL IN PEKING, WE WERE SUCCESSFUL IN MOSCOW, WE
WERE EVEN SUCCESSFUL IN PARIS. THERE IS NO REASON WHY WE
CANNOT BE SUCCESSFUL HERE." THIEU'S YOUNG FOREIGN POLICY
ADVISER HOANG DUC NHA REPLIED: "SO FAR HISTORY HAS SHOWN
THAT THE UNITED STATES HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN MANY FIELDS.
BUT HISTORY DOES NOT PREDICT THAT IN THE FUTURE THE UNITED
STATES WILL BE SUCCESSFUL HERE."

KISSINGER AND BUNKER HELD THEIR LAST MEETING WITH
THIEU ON OCTOBER 23. DESPITE KISSINGER'S ENTREATIES,
THIEU REMAINED TOTALLY OPPOSED TO THE PEACE PLAN. KISSINGER
REPORTED THIS TO NIXON WHO, IN TURN, INFORMED HANOI THAT
THE SAIGON TALKS HAD HIT A SNAG AND THAT, AFTER ALL, THE
SIGNING OF THE PEACE AGREEMENT COULD NO LONGER BE DONE ON
OCTOBER 31. HEAVY-HEARTED, KISSINGER CANCELLED HIS HANOI
TRIP AND DEJECTED AND EXHAUSTED, FLEW BACK TO WASHINGTON.
UNQUOTE.

16. QUOTE. KISSINGER, IN FACT, WAS DEEPLY CONCERNED THAT
HIS NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE NORTH VIETNAMESE WOULD COLLAPSE
BECAUSE OF SAIGON'S OPPOSITION. WHILE STILL IN SAIGON, HE
HAD URGED NIXON BY CABLE ON OCTOBER 23 TO SUSPEND AMERICAN
BOMBINGS NORTH OF THE 20TH PARALLEL AS A GESTURE OF GOOD-
WILL. HE EVEN SUGGESTED THE END OF U. S. TACTICAL AIR SUP-
PORT TO THE ARVN TO SHOW HIS ANNOYANCE WITH THIEU.
NIXON AGREED TO HALT THE BOMBINGS IN THE NORTH, BUT RE-
FUSED TO CANCEL BATTLEFIELD AIR SUPPORT. THE PRESSURE ON
EVERYONE INVOLVED WAS INTENSE: BEFORE HIS RETURN FROM
SAIGON TO WASHINGTON KISSINGER HAD A SERIES OF BITTER
CABLE EXCHANGES WITH HAIG, WHO THOUGHT THAT THE AMERICAN

NEGOTIATING POSITION WAS ERODING. UNQUOTE.

17. QUOTE. THUS, AS SOON AS THE (ELECTION) RETURNS WERE IN, HAIG WAS DISPATCHED TO SAIGON TO DISCUSS THE "MINIMUM CHANGES" TO BE NEGOTIATED WITH HANOI. HAIG, WHO UNLIKE KISSINGER WAS STILL ON SPEAKING TERMS WITH THIEU, TOLD THIEU ON NOVEMBER 9 THAT HE SHOULD NOT TAKE TOO MUCH COMFORT FROM THE AMERICAN ELECTIONS. HE WARNED HIM THAT ALTHOUGH WASHINGTON WOULD DO ITS BEST TO IMPROVE THE TERMS, IT WOULD NOT GIVE UP ITS COMMITMENT FOR THE TRIPARTITE UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 12 STATE 116074

ELECTORAL COMMISSION. THIEU REOPENED HIS OBJECTIONS TO THE DRAFT LANGUAGE DEFINING THE AREAS OF MILITARY CONTROL BY THE TWO SIDES IN SOUTH VIETNAM AND RESISTED ANYTHING THAT WOULD BIND HIM MILITARILY. THE NORTH VIETNAMESE WERE OVEREXTENDED IN THE SOUTH AT THAT STAGE--MANY OF THEIR UNITS HAD NOT BEEN ADVISED TO PREPARE FOR A CEASE-FIRE--AND NOW THIEU WAS STALLING WHILE THE ARVN TRIED TO IMPROVE ITS POSITION.

...AND DISASTER IN PARIS

KISSINGER RETURNED TO PARIS ON NOVEMBER 20 FOR A NEW ROUND OF TALKS WITH THO--TO SETTLE WHAT HE HAD SAID THE PREVIOUS MONTH WOULD BE THE FINAL DETAILS. BUT, AGAIN, HE MISCALCULATED THE SITUATION. ON NIXON'S INSTRUCTIONS, HE CONVINCED THE NORTH VIETNAMESE TO INCLUDE IN THE TEXT A DEFINITION OF THE DEMILITARIZED ZONE AS A PROVISIONAL POLITICAL DIVISION LINE. THIS WAS DESIGNED TO PACIFY THIEU. KISSINGER ALSO READ "FOR THE RECORD" A SOUTH VIETNAMESE DOCUMENT DEMANDING 69 CHANGES IN THE TEXT. BUT THE NEXT DAY, NOVEMBER 21, KISSINGER RETRACTED ABOUT ONE-HALF OF THESE PROPOSED CHANGES. KISSINGER SAID LATER THAT IT WAS NOT CONCEIVABLE THAT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE WOULD HAVE TAKEN THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE DEMANDS SERIOUSLY. HOWEVER, IT WAS PROBABLY A MISTAKE FOR HIM TO HAVE EVER RAISED THEM SO LATE IN THE GAME. UNQUOTE.

18. QUOTE. THE ADMINISTRATION REALIZED THAT THE BOMBINGS WERE NOT SUSTAINABLE OVER AN INDEFINITE PERIOD, FOR INTERNATIONAL AS WELL AS DOMESTIC REASONS. THEY WERE, THEREFORE, A SHORT-TERM PROPOSITION. THIS THEORY IS BORNE OUT BY THE FACT THAT ON THE DAY THE BOMBINGS WERE RESUMED, HAIG FLEW TO SAIGON WITH A SECRET LETTER FROM NIXON URGING THIEU TO ACCEPT THE SETTLEMENT. HAIG ALSO TOLD THIEU THAT, WHILE THE UNITED STATES WAS "BRUTALIZING" NORTH VIETNAM, IT WOULD SIGN A PEACE AGREEMENT IF HANOI WOULD MAKE A FEW CHANGES IN THE TEXT. HE INFORMED THIEU THAT IF HE REMAINED ADAMANT, HE COULD NO LONGER COUNT ON AMERICAN ASSISTANCE. ON DECEMBER 21, THIEU HANDED HAIG A LETTER FOR NIXON SAYING THAT HE FELT THAT HE HAD BEEN GIVEN AN ULTI-

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 13 STATE 116074

MATUM AND THAT HE COULD NOT BELIEVE THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES WOULD DEAL IN SUCH A MANNER WITH AN ALLY. WHEN KISSINGER READ THE LETTER, HE COMMENTED BITTERLY: "ALL THE VIETNAMESE PARTIES ARE AGAINST US."

"THE MEETINGS IN PARIS RESUME ON JANUARY 7, 1973. THE UNITED STATES, IN KISSINGER'S VIEW, WAS NOW IN AN EXCELLENT POSITION TO OBTAIN AN AGREEMENT. THIEU WAS MUCH MORE AMENABLE TO ACCEPTING THE BASIC TEXT IN VIEW OF THE

CHRISTMAS BOMBINGS; HIS RELATIVE MILITARY POSITION HAD IMPROVED. THERE IS NO KNOWN EVIDENCE THAT KISSINGER HAD OPPOSED THE CHRISTMAS BOMBINGS (AS HE HINTED TO SEVERAL LIBERAL WASHINGTON COLUMNISTS). UNQUOTE.

19. QUOTE. WHAT AMERICAN NEGOTIATORS WANTED MOST WAS A TEXT WITH THE MAXIMUM AMBIGUITY OF LANGUAGE SO AS TO GIVE THE UNITED STATES ALL THE FLEXIBILITY POSSIBLE IN SUPPORTING SOUTH VIETNAM MILITARILY AFTER THE TRUCE. BUT THEY ALSO ENTERED INTO A SERIES OF SECRET AND HERETOFORE UNPUBLICIZED AGREEMENTS WITH HANOI, MOST OF THEM UNFULFILLED, PRESUMABLY AS A QUID PRO QUO FOR AMBIGUITIES ELSEWHERE.

WHAT DID THE AGREEMENT MEAN?

THE FRAME OF MIND OF THE KISSINGER TEAM, THE SECRET COMMITMENTS, AND THE DELIBERATE AMBIGUITIES ARE WELL REFLECTED IN A SECRET STATE DEPARTMENT DOCUMENT ENTITLED "INTERPRETATIONS OF THE AGREEMENT ON ENDING THE WAR AND RESTORING PEACE IN VIETNAM," PREPARED EARLY IN 1973 BY GEORGE ALDRICH, THE DEPUTY LEGAL ADVISER.

THE MOST IMPORTANT COMMITMENT CONCERNS AMERICAN CIVILIAN PERSONNEL WORKING WITH THE ARVN. IN ALDRICH'S WORDS:

THE UNITED STATES HAS ASSURED THE DRV (DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM) THAT WE SHALL WITHDRAW FROM SOUTH VIETNAM WITHIN TWELVE MONTHS FROM THE SIGNATURE OF THE AGREEMENT ALL OUR CIVILIAN PERSONNEL "WORKING IN THE ARMED
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 14 STATE 116074

FORCES OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM." WE HAVE ALSO ASSURED THE DRV THAT THE MAJORITY OF THEM WILL BE WITHDRAWN WITHIN TEN MONTHS. THESE ASSURANCES CLEARLY COVER ALL U. S. GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES WHOSE PRINCIPAL DUTIES ARE WITH GVN ARMED FORCES. IT IS UNCLEAR WHETHER IT APPLIES TO

U. S. NATIONALS EMPLOYED BY CONTRACTORS OF EITHER THE UNITED STATES OR THE GVN.

THIS COMMITMENT REMAINS UNFULFILLED AS OF MAY 1974--
15 MONTHS AFTER THE SIGNING OF THE AGREEMENT. THERE ARE
AN ESTIMATED 9,000 AMERICAN CIVILIANS IN SOUTH VIETNAM,
MOST ENGAGED DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY IN SUPPORTING THE
ARVN, ESPECIALLY IN AVIATION.UNQUOTE-

20. QUOTE. THUS A TOP-SECRET TELGRAM WAS SENT TO
WASHINGTON ON MARCH 27, 1973 BY MAURICE J. WILLIAMS, THE
PRINCIPAL AMERICAN NEGOTIATOR, REPORTING THAT A VIRTUALLY
COMPLETE AGREEMENT HAD BEEN REACHED ON OPERATING

PROCEDURES TO GOVERN THE PROVISION OF U. S. AID TO NORTH
VIETNAM. THE SINGLE UNRESOLVED POINT, WILLIAMS STATED,
INVOLVED HOW THE NORTH VIETNAMESE WERE TO REPORT ON HOW THE
AID WOULD BE USED. THE ADMINISTRATION, DECIDING TO DROP
THE WHOLE PROJECT FOR POLITICAL REASONS, NEVER MADE PUBLIC
THE FACT THAT THE UNITED STATES HAD BEEN ONE STEP AWAY
FROM A BILATERAL ACCORD WITH HANOI. UNQUOTE.

21. QUOTE. GRANTING THE DANGERS OF SECOND-GUESSING RE-
CENT HISTORY, THE FOLLOWING POINTS CAN BE MADE ON THE
BASIS OF WHAT IS KNOW KNOWN OF THE VIETNAM NEGOTIATIONS:

A. AGREEMENT WITH HANOI WAS PROBABLY POSSIBLE IN
DECEMBER 1972 WITHOUT THE FINAL PAROXYSMS OF THE CHRISTMAS
BOMBINGS.

B. THE CHRISTMAS BOMBINGS, THEREFORE, WERE DESIGNED TO
INDUCE THIEU TO SIGN THE PARIS AGREEMENT, THE PRICE BEING
THE "BRUTALIZING" OF THE NORTH. BUT, AT THE SAME TIME,
THIS WAS THE PRICE THAT HAD TO BE PAID FOR KISSINGER'S MIS-
CALCULATION OF THIEU'S RESPONSES TO THE SEPTEMBER AND
OCTOBER 1972 PROPOSALS ON WHICH HE WAS NEVER ADEQUATELY, IF
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 15 STATE 116074

AT ALL, CONSULTED. FAILURE TO CONSULT ALLIES SEEMS TO BE
A KISSINGER HALLMARK. HAD KISSINGER BEEN MORE OPEN AND
FORCEFUL WITH THIEU IN AUGUST 1972, MUCH GRIEF AND TRAGEDY
MIGHT HAVE BEEN AVOIDED.

C. IN ALL FAIRNESS TO KISSINGER, IT MUST BE RECOGNIZED
THAT A SETTLEMENT, AS DISTINCT FROM AN AMERICAN CAVE-IN
WHICH NIXON WOULD NOT HAVE TOLERATED, BECAME POSSIBLE ONLY
IN OCTOBER, WHEN HANOI AND THE VIETCONG DROPPED THEIR DE-
MAND THAT THIEU BE OUSTED AS A SINE QUA NON OF PEACE.

D. BUT THE OBTVERSE OF THIS ARGUMENT IS THAT HANOI
MIGHT HAVE BEEN READY EARLIER FOR SUCH A COMPROMISE IF
KISSINGER HAD NOT WAITED UNTIL THE SPRING OF 1972 TO TELL

THE RUSSIANS THAT THE UNITED STATES NO LONGER, IN EFFECT, INSISTED ON THE EVACUATION OF NORTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS FROM THE SOUTH AND THAT IT WOULD GO FOR A POLITICAL DEAL ON THE BASIS OF THE TRIPARTITE COMMISSION.

E. IT MUST HAVE BEEN PREDICTABLE FROM THE VERY OUT-SET--FROM THE TIME THE FIRST BOMBING HALT WAS NEGOTIATED IN 1968--THAT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE WOULD NEVER LEAVE THE SOUTH. OTHER THAN THE EFFORT AT VIETNAMIZATION, THEREFORE, THERE IS NO SATISFACTORY REASON FOR KISSINGER TO HAVE REFUSED TO RECOGNIZE REALITY FOR THREE YEARS. THE MASSIVE AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN 1972 AND THE CONTINUING MILITARY SUPPORT FOR SAIGON SUGGEST THAT VIETNAMIZATION

HAD FALLEN SHORT OF EXPECTATIONS.

F. IT IS REMARKABLE--AND INSTRUCTIVE--TO NOTE THE EXTREMELY CLOSE PARALLELS BETWEEN THE NEGOTIATIONS OF 1972 AND THE U. S.-NORTH VIETNAMESE NEGOTIATIONS OF 1968 CONCERNING THE CESSATION OF THE BOMBING OF NORTH VIETNAM.

G. THIS NEGOTIATION STORY OFFERS A UNIQUE INSIGHT INTO THE BRILLIANCE, STAMINA, AND TACTICS OF HENRY KISSINGER.

H. A YEAR-AND-A-HALF AFTER THE PARIS SIGNINGS, THIEU REMAINS IN POWER, WHICH ON THE SURFACE BOLSTERS NIXON'S ASSERTION THAT WE HAVE "PEACE WITH HONOR" IN VIETNAM. BUT UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 16 STATE 116074

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN IS THAT THIEU CANNOT SURVIVE WITHOUT CONTINUING AMERICAN SUPPORT.

I. THE FACT IS THAT AS LONG AS THE UNITED STATES SUPPORTS THE THIEU GOVERNMENT IN ANY MAJOR WAY, AND AS LONG AS THE PRESSURE TO REMOVE THAT GOVERNMENT CONTINUES FROM HANOI, THERE WILL BE A CONTINUING CONFLICT WITH THE POTENTIAL TO ESCALATE AGAIN INTO AN INTERNATIONAL ISSUE. THUS, VIETNAM REMAINS A THREAT TO DETENTE, EVEN IF IT IS A DIMINISHED ONE. UNQUOTE. KISSINGER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 27 JUL 1999
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, ARMISTICE, AGREEMENTS, FOREIGN POLICY POSITION, FOREIGN COMMITMENTS, MILITARY PLANS, FOREIGN ASSISTANCE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 JUN 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: n/a
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 JAN 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974STATE116074
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: EA/VN:RHWENZEL:BK
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: n/a
Film Number: D740140-1169
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740688/abbryzmk.tel
Line Count: 692
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, TEXT ON MICROFILM
Office: ORIGIN EA
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 13
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: elyme
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 11 OCT 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <11 OCT 2002 by PhilliR0>; APPROVED <08 JAN 2003 by elyme>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SZULC ARTICLE
TAGS: PFOR, VS, US
To: SAIGON INFO CANBERRA
HONG KONG
MANILA
MOSCOW
JEC PARIS
PHNOM PENH

PEKING
VIENTIANE
CINCPAC

Type: TE

Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005